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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TEGUCIGALPA 000889

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PGOV PINR KDEM HO

SUBJECT: TFH01: HOW THE COUP IS SEEN OUTSIDE THE CAPITAL,
PART THREE: POLITICAL AND BUSINESS LEADERS IN DANLI AND EL
PARAISO

REF: A. TEGUCIGALPA 806

1B. TEGUCIGALPA 661

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Simon Henshaw, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) Summary. Poloff met with local mayors, business leaders and anti-coup supporters in the towns of Danli and El Paraiso. The political opinions varied widely; however there appeared to be a strong desire to move forward either through November elections or the San Jose Accord. The mayor of El Paraiso expressed particular concern with the possibility that November elections could be plagued by heavy military presence, high voter absenteeism, and possible violence. End Summary.

12. (U) This cable represents part three in a series of reports on the opinions of Hondurans outside the political circles of the capital. Ref A reported visits to the Comayagua Valley and La Paz. This report is based on a September 2 visit to the south-eastern department of El Paraiso, a department that is traditionally a political battleground between the Liberal and National parties.

ELECTIONS

13. (C) Mayor Luz Victoria Oliva of Danli and Mayor Ovidio Segura are both liberal party members, but have very different ideas on how to solve the current political crisis. Oliva stated she does not agree with the way President Zelaya was removed, but looks to elections to solve the stalemate and expressed pessimism about the possibility of a solution through the San Jose Accords. Oliva attended the first pro-Micheletti regime march in early July in Danli, but then decided her participation could be used against her and decided to serve out her term without being publicly supportive of either side in the conflict.

14. (C) In El Paraiso, which was impacted greatly by July 24-25 protests near the border, Mayor Ovidio Segura expressed deep concern about the idea of elections being the solution to the current political crisis. Critical of President Zelaya's closeness to Chavez, Segura, who is up for re-election as mayor, said the liberal party was deeply fractured. He said there was a large faction that views Elvin Santos as complicit in the coup and if President Zelaya does not return, this faction plans to disrupt the elections. Segura stated he was particularly concerned about the prospect of polling stations with a heavy military presence and the possibility of further clashes and violence. He also expressed unease that elections would be used by the de facto

government as validation that June 28 was not a coup. As a counter solution, Segura offered the idea that President Zelaya could be given "an extra few months" in office equal to the time he spent outside Honduras, postponing elections by that amount of time. Without addressing the political implications of Zelaya staying in office past January 2010, Segura argued this would allow time for the constitutional order to be reestablished.

¶ 15. (C) Poloff also met with Miguel Berrios, who is current president of Danli's Tourism Board, and Ramon Gonzalez, a city employee active in the pro-Zelaya demonstrations. Berrios argued that November elections were the only way to move forward because he viewed the action on June 28 as a "democratic accession" to power by Micheletti. Berrios did not address the issue of President Zelaya's forced removal from the country. Ramon Gonzales expressed the pro-Zelaya argument that a coup had occurred and that President Zelaya must return in order to restore constitutional order before the November elections.

VIEWS ON THE COUP

¶ 16. (C) Mayor Oliva of Danli recalled being age 14 during the coup that took place in Honduras in 1973 and concluded that there is nothing else one can call the removal of President Zelaya on June 28. However, she expressed disagreement with Zelaya's perceived "closeness to Chavez" and asked Poloff what should happen to a President when he has clearly committed wrongs. (Poloff explained that democratic state

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institutions should be capable of dealing with conflicts between the branches of government.)

¶ 17. (C) Oliva described the July 24-25 protests at Las Manos near Danli as "very difficult" on her community, especially due to the curfew under which the town lived (Ref B). She said the town tried to return to normalcy and recently held its annual "Festival of Corn," which was widely attended and to Oliva was a good sign that the town was on the road to normalcy.

¶ 18. (C) Thirty minutes away in the town of El Paraíso, Mayor Ovidio Segura said that while his town may appear normal on the surface, one only needs to scratch the surface to see that people are deeply worried about the crisis and the way forward. Segura stated that he sees Zelaya's presidency as marked by "bad decisions," but that this did not excuse a coup against a democratically elected president.

¶ 19. (C) Danli businessman Miguel Berrios stated the political crisis and removal of President Zelaya was of his own making. He said that the crisis became irreversible when President Zelaya unilaterally increased the minimum wage and that it only became a certainty with Zelaya's call for a constituent assembly. Berrios said that Honduras only wants justice and that Zelaya could return if he faced justice.

¶ 10. (C) Berrios expressed his apprehension and that of many in the business community with actions by the United States to revoke visas and close the consular section. Poloff responded that these steps were taken to send a message to the de facto regime that it is not business as usual for the U.S. government and that our long history of friendship with Honduras should indicate that our long term goal is fostering a stable democracy in Honduras. Additionally, Poloff explained that the United States believes that Honduras' constitutional order was broken by the events of June 28 and that the United States supports justice within constitutional order.

¶ 11. (C) Comment: The viewpoints regarding the crisis in Danli and El Paraíso are deeply engrained following the very public

protests and attempt by President Zelaya to return on July 24. Our conversations continue to show that party affiliation does not result in one viewpoint on the crisis. All sides expressed appreciation that Emboffs travelled to hear their opinions, but there were conflicting and differing opinions on elections and how things will play out. The business community in particular appreciated hearing first hand a more detailed explanation of U.S. policy. End comment.

HENSHAW